

New for 2017 is a rearview mirror that isn't a mirror at all. Instead, it is actually a high-resolution screen for a camera mounted to the Escalade's tailgate. The mirror takes some getting used to, but it eliminates any blind spot normally caused by the SUV's big roof pillars.

CUE includes as standard Apple Car Play and Android Auto connectivity, as well as a Bose Counterpoint 2.0 audio system. To keep rear seat passengers occupied, rear seat entertainment systems are available with one or two screens depending on trim. (Luxury and higher trims can get dual monitors in the front headrests, when selected.) Parent company General Motors' OnStar 4G LTE connectivity also comes standard and includes a Wi-Fi antenna that makes the 'Slade into a mobile hotspot—albeit for an extra monthly charge after an initial trial period.

Opt for the range-topping Escalade Platinum package, available on either wheelbase, and the interior comes alive with aromatic semi-aniline leather trim. Short of a Bentley or a Rolls-Royce, we can't think of many vehicles upholstered in so much leather. Second- and third-row seats fold flat at the touch of a button, and though the cargo floor is somewhat higher than in previous Escalades, it's at a waist-height level that makes it relatively easy to load and unload heavier items. There's over 15 cubic feet of space behind the third row on the standard Escalade, a capacity that more than doubles on the long-wheelbase Escalade ESV.

Cadillac Escalade performance

A different kind of beast sits under the SUV's angular hood: A 6.2-liter V-8 rated at 420 horsepower and 460 lb-ft of torque. It pairs well with the standard 8-speed automatic transmission to reach 60 mph in around six seconds, an impressive feat for a vehicle that tips the scales at about 6,000 pounds when fully equipped. That performance doesn't hurt efficiency as much as you might think—with features like direct injection and cylinder shutoff, the V-8 earns EPA ratings as high as 17 mpg combined.

As in previous generations, the 2016 Escalade comes in rear wheel-drive and all-wheel-drive variants, the latter of which is designed more for slushy weather than climbing a mountain. With running gear derived from that of GM's full-size pickup truck line, the Escalade one of few large luxury SUVs with a solid rear axle. That's old-school tech, and it helps explain the high cargo floor, but Cadillac's Magnetic Ride Control dampers are standard and finally give the Escalade a ride quality almost on par with segment leaders. Where the Escalade really comes into play is its towing ability; rated at up to 8,300 pounds, the big SUV tows especially confidently.

Safety equipment includes an innovative front-center airbag that protects front-seat occupants thrown toward the center of the Escalade